



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

At present they are likely to catch little interest from the instructor's attitude toward his work and his students. They find themselves lost in a big machine, with little chance to develop skill along the lines of their own needs. They can see little or no connection between the assigned readings and themes and the use of speech and writing which lies ahead of them in their own lives. They are seldom invited to submit writing done outside the course, with that warm interest bred of actuality, in partial fulfilment of course requirements.

The teaching of composition is a big *human* problem, in which the imparting of knowledge is a mere incident. Why not come out of our self-complacency, get in fuller contact with life outside academic walls, and work aggressively to make our teaching service more effective? This is enough to stir the imagination and challenge the ambition of the ablest teacher.

N. W. BARNES

DE PAUW UNIVERSITY
GREENCASTLE, INDIANA

OUR RHETORIC SLAVE

Most departments of English have slaves; in many, their labor is distinctly unskilled and must of necessity be so, in the field of theme-reading. As every teacher knows, the judiciousness, the tactfulness, the constructive suggestiveness of good theme-reading is perhaps the most highly specialized of his whole work. He knows, too, that the comments on the themes are the most stimulating motive possible for the class discussions and for conferences. And yet, this delicate work is frequently turned over to a graduate student or to a Senior who writes well and who needs the money, inexperienced in criticism and detached from the work of the course though he be. The theme-reading goes along the severe and hide-bound lines of amateur criticism, and the class work loses much of its pointedness. Good results are, to speak charitably, less certain than they should be in an age of efficiency.

The reason for such a state of affairs is, of course, the great bulk of work for him who gives composition courses. There is too much to be done for him to handle even the essentials of the work alone; there are many things that he would have to leave undone. There are some things, nearly as essential, which he cannot get in as it is. One of these overlooked items, in many colleges, is the reading of the revised or rewritten themes; the instructor simply has to leave that work to the earnestness and honor of the students. He cannot handle all the themes

once for recording, once for correcting, and once for inspecting revisions. He needs help, unskilled though it be.

These two difficulties help to solve each other. A student assistant usually cannot read themes effectively; the instructor can and should. A student can do all the preliminary bookkeeping; the instructor can use the time saved for the extra theme-reading. Besides, the student assistant can go over revised themes to see whether the instructor's suggestions have been carried out, and thus perform successfully an integral part of a well-co-ordinated course. Our Rhetoric Slave has these two functions: to check up every theme as it comes in; to keep a record of the thoroughness and intelligence of the revisions. At such work, he is not unskilled labor and is distinctly worth the princely salary the college gives him.

We choose a student who has had several courses under the instructor whom he is to assist in order that, at the outset, he shall know the methods of work and the significance of the criticisms better than the students whose work he follows. In the twelve hours a week he gives, he is able to do the work for four or five sections of ordinary size. His checking-up work is, of course, perfectly ordinary; he records each theme as it comes in, with a special mark for late themes. (It might be said in passing that there are no late themes except for sound excuse; a student who does not get around to his theme because of the press of his engagements has no further opportunity to learn that particular thing.) Examining the revisions is the main part of his work and the part which is perhaps a little different from ordinary practice. This work goes quickly because of the method of correction. The instructor writes his suggestions in pencil, and the student writes his revisions in red ink, either between the lines or on inserts so that the inspector can see, sometimes at a glance and always readily (if the instructor writes legibly), just what was desired and what has been done. He has before him, besides, a chart by number of the main rules in Woolley on diction, manuscript form, sentence-structure, and paragraphing to refer to the numbers used by the instructor in the margin. If he finds the revision done thoroughly and intelligently, he stamps it "Approved," and so records it by a simple system of crosses on mathematics paper. If the revision is not well done, he checks with red pencil the unrevised passage and stamps it "Confer," with the date. Within three days of that date the student must bring the paper for more help and after that conference, pass the theme in again.

Motivation and efficiency of conference is an interesting by-product of the scheme. A student wants to have help on his work because he has tried and not succeeded—a motive for him; or he is shiftless about his work and needs to be labored with, a motive for the instructor. Such a method dispenses with unnecessary conferences, saves talking over a lot of things the student can do just as well and better for himself. The chief advantage is, however, the thoroughness of the revision with the consequent raising of the standard of following themes. Suggestions cannot be ignored, and sooner or later—usually sooner—the student tries to carry them out as best he can. As a result he takes a more vital interest in the instruction of the classroom and values with some degree of appreciation the help he gets in conference. He gets the all-valuable idea that each theme should be distinctly better than its predecessor in certain respects and that if he does as he is told, it will be. He regards with wholesome interest the fact that his grade on revision counts appreciably in his semester's work.

The ideal state which the enthusiasm of composition has set forth thus glowingly can really be approximated—at least with some of the students some of the time by the aid of an ordinary student-assistant. For, to reiterate, while he is not able always to see what is needed and does not know how to get the thing done if he could, he can judge whether a passage has been made more specific or whether a corrected sentence matches up with the right example, e.g., Woolley 132*a*. If an occasional passage presents matters that he cannot judge readily, he can try correcting mechanical exercises like bibliographies, and the instructor can take the revised passage. But usually he can handle them all, although he will groan at the rewritten themes, involving a perusal of both first and second editions! He suffers, however, for his own good as well as for the uplift of underclassmen. What he does is excellent training for a prospective teacher in the indispensable office work of a composition course and in the methods of theme-reading and theme-grading—much more so than blundering along in the reading of themes. It is likewise a help to him in his own writing; he learns so much that one seizes the opportunity to let whole sections be revision clerks. They, too, can see whether revision has been adequately done and so, by vicarious practice, help to fix their own “indispensable habit.”

DAVIDA McCASLIN

JAMES MILLIKIN UNIVERSITY
DECATUR, ILL.